



The Bell Tower

2014 Arts Journal



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The Bell Tower Arts Journal

Volume 8
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Editor

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The editorial board for the journal is comprised of full-time faculty members from the English Department, the Graphic Arts Department, and the Fine Arts Department. The editorial board has the final approval on all selections and publication decisions.

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About the title:

Just as the Bell Tower at Tyler Junior College chimes on the quarter hour to mark the passage of time, it reminds students of the harmony which surrounds them in their educational pursuits. Music, dance, theatre, art, athletics, and academics blend to make Tyler Junior College a beacon to the community, the state, and the world at large. As the echoes of the chords filter through the oaks, their vibrations tremble far beyond the confines of the brick archways and winding walks where students gather. Tyler Junior College is a lofty tower of educational opportunity for students who have come from all parts of the world. The Bell Tower Arts Journal proudly hails the accomplishments of its hallowed halls and beckons those who would seek both its traditions and the promise of tomorrow.

~Judith Bateman, 2006

Editorial Policy:

The Bell Tower Arts Journal is sponsored by the Psi Gamma Chapter of Sigma Kappa Delta, the National English Honor Society. We accept submissions of poetry, short fiction, non-fiction essays, photography, and fine and graphic art by current Tyler Junior College students. We accept submissions for consideration only during the fall semester each year for possible publication in the subsequent spring semester. The Bell Tower Arts Journal is entirely student generated and seeks to provide a publishing venue for the rich artistic expression of TJC students.

Our goal is to create a publication that is a high quality, content-rich source of literary and artistic expression on a wide range of topics and themes. Therefore, we seek unique, insightful work displaying vivid, lively language and artistic skill.

All submissions must be the original work of the student writer or artist who submits it for consideration or publication. We do not accept previously published or plagiarized work. Every attempt is made by the editor to assure originality. All literary pieces will be submitted to turnitin.com for an originality report. However, it is ultimately the responsibility of each student to submit only his or her own literary and artistic work.

Moreover, while we strongly support intellectual freedom as the right of every individual from all points of view, we do not accept work deemed pornographic, profane, exploitative, or that seeks to cause injury to an individual or group.

Tyler Junior College gives equal consideration to all applicants for admission, employment and participation in its programs and activities without regard to race, creed, color, national origin, gender, age, marital status, disability or veteran status.

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Laugh Over Spilled Galaxy!
Matthew L. Hopkins / Grand Saline / Digital Drawing

Descent into Darkness

Julie Speaks / Arp

Crimson and gold flowing river,
Sparks of diamond light,
Spaced with precision and grace,
Pools of raven darkness sneak, abound,
Chained and imprisoned, trapped eternally.

Secrets creep with cat-like precision.
What do you know?
Tell us with your silence
Stories of fear, betrayal, and love.
Child-like innocence: a dance everlasting.

Alluring desirable spheres,
Crystal balls and spells of age,
Seduction with just one glance,
I'm falling into your trance—
Don't let me go.

Now creased with ugliness,
A backfire of mistrust;
Time now a mortal enemy:
Complete darkness,
Shades of storm-cloud gray cover you.

No longer can you see
Blindness so deep, your soul missing;
Sadness inside these lifeless memories:
Shadows now entrap all,
You're eyes no longer see.

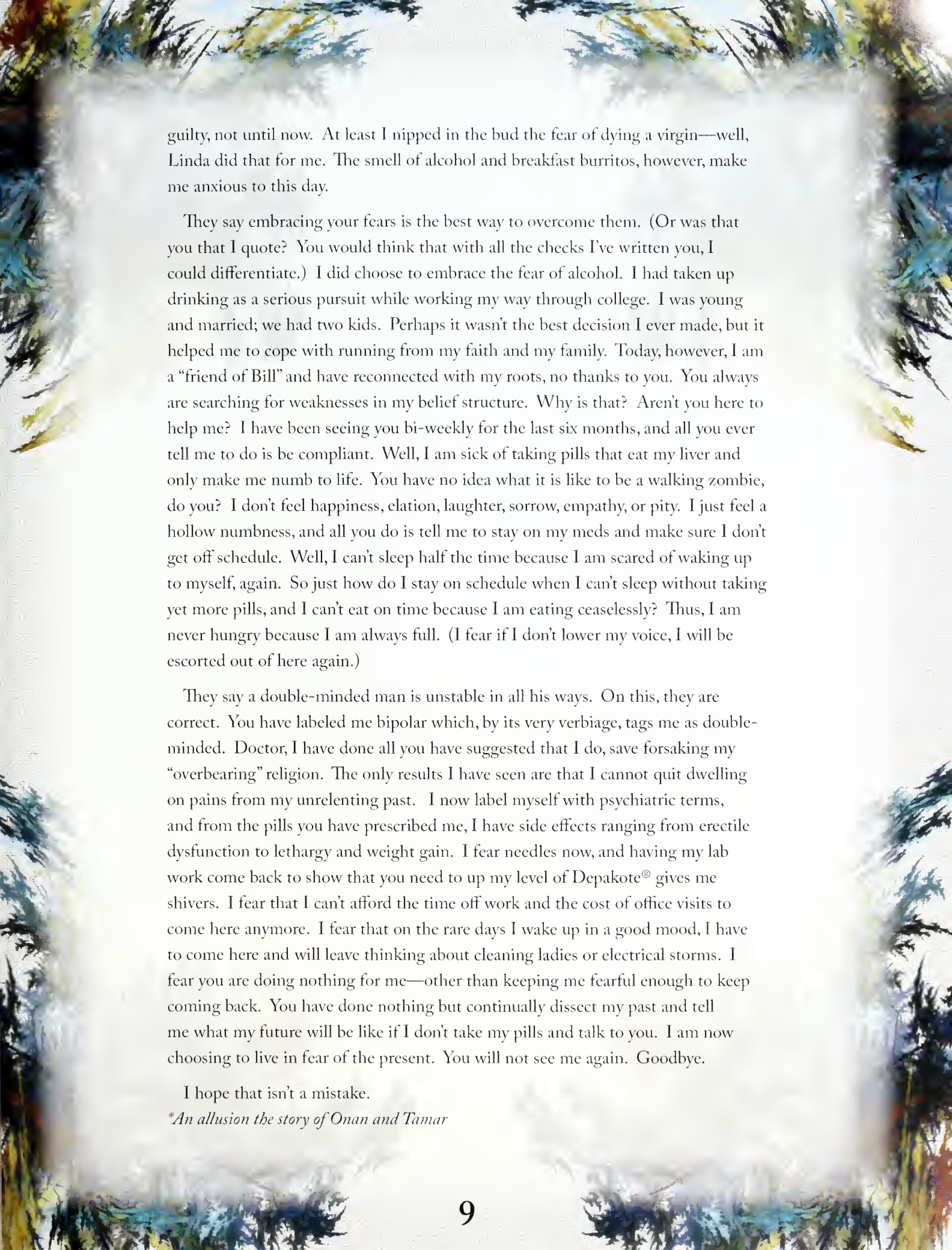
Zoephobia

John Gray / Troup

They say that faith is the opposite of fear—or vice versa. I can't keep their clichés straight; they say a lot. Of course my faith has failed me; why else would I be here? Growing up in what some would consider a cult, we always kept society's acceptable rituals at arm's length. Birthdays were the only holiday we were finally able to erode enough of Dad's blockades to celebrate. I suppose that would explain the dread I feel every year when my youngest hands me a handwritten card; not only does it signify that another year has slipped from my grasp, but also I have innate guilt about permitting my son to indulge in paganism. By letting my ex allow him to write a personal acknowledgement to me, I permissively endorse his exercise in vain ritualism. I shouldn't stand for such compromise as Dad did. Confining as you have told me it is, it's all I know. My religion does grant me the opportunity to spot flaws in others in order to keep them away from me and mine. We have spoken of it *ad nauseam* in past conversations, so I feel like we're beating a dead horse. I fear not letting go of what is failing for me is better than letting go and not being able to find another rope to cling to. It is MY rope--you cannot have it.

Future events appear real: they say that, too—a short acrostic on fear. But I now face a once-future event that has become real. My mother has dementia. I, too, worry that I may someday be so confused. To make matters worse—for me—she now lives with me—or me with her, depending on whose side you're on. After my divorce, I ran out of money, and to solve that problem as well as to help Mom out around the house, I moved in. That was two years ago. She has always been forgetful, especially after Dad got struck by lightning, and in general, she's never been the best loner. As the forgetfulness increased, we finally convinced her to get tested. This week they diagnosed her. It's my deduction that she sometimes wants to forget.

Mom should forget about maids with beauty marks, that's for sure. The whole family was in shock when she took Dad back after he had "my brother" with Consuela. (Or was it Linda? No, it was Consuela.) Linda was my dread. But can you blame me? I was only thirteen. Linda (pronounced *Leenda*, as in Linda Garcia) was Consuela's replacement after Dad sent her away. When my parents were at work and my brothers were running in the streets during the summer, Linda used to come to me reeking of stale weed and last night's Busch Light. She wasn't exactly an adolescent's dream: thirty-something, with about a half dozen kids, a large belly, and loose skin, but I had my hormones. Plus I had my justification: "it is better to spill your seed in the belly of a whore than on the ground."* So I never felt too



guilty, not until now. At least I nipped in the bud the fear of dying a virgin—well, Linda did that for me. The smell of alcohol and breakfast burritos, however, make me anxious to this day.

They say embracing your fears is the best way to overcome them. (Or was that you that I quote? You would think that with all the checks I've written you, I could differentiate.) I did choose to embrace the fear of alcohol. I had taken up drinking as a serious pursuit while working my way through college. I was young and married; we had two kids. Perhaps it wasn't the best decision I ever made, but it helped me to cope with running from my faith and my family. Today, however, I am a "friend of Bill" and have reconnected with my roots, no thanks to you. You always are searching for weaknesses in my belief structure. Why is that? Aren't you here to help me? I have been seeing you bi-weekly for the last six months, and all you ever tell me to do is be compliant. Well, I am sick of taking pills that eat my liver and only make me numb to life. You have no idea what it is like to be a walking zombie, do you? I don't feel happiness, elation, laughter, sorrow, empathy, or pity. I just feel a hollow numbness, and all you do is tell me to stay on my meds and make sure I don't get off schedule. Well, I can't sleep half the time because I am scared of waking up to myself, again. So just how do I stay on schedule when I can't sleep without taking yet more pills, and I can't eat on time because I am eating ceaselessly? Thus, I am never hungry because I am always full. (I fear if I don't lower my voice, I will be escorted out of here again.)

They say a double-minded man is unstable in all his ways. On this, they are correct. You have labeled me bipolar which, by its very verbiage, tags me as double-minded. Doctor, I have done all you have suggested that I do, save forsaking my "overbearing" religion. The only results I have seen are that I cannot quit dwelling on pains from my unrelenting past. I now label myself with psychiatric terms, and from the pills you have prescribed me, I have side effects ranging from erectile dysfunction to lethargy and weight gain. I fear needles now, and having my lab work come back to show that you need to up my level of Depakote® gives me shivers. I fear that I can't afford the time off work and the cost of office visits to come here anymore. I fear that on the rare days I wake up in a good mood, I have to come here and will leave thinking about cleaning ladies or electrical storms. I fear you are doing nothing for me—other than keeping me fearful enough to keep coming back. You have done nothing but continually dissect my past and tell me what my future will be like if I don't take my pills and talk to you. I am now choosing to live in fear of the present. You will not see me again. Goodbye.

I hope that isn't a mistake.

**An allusion the story of Onan and Tamar*



Stranger's Fiction
Erick Rodriguez / Tyler / Graphite



River Song
Rachel Bonner / Troup / Oil



The Hand

Judith Pineda / Tyler / Digital Photograph

Time

Carl Speaks / Arp

Shadows dance in my memories,
Filling the space of what's forgotten:
A crowded sea of human forms
Orderless, fading, and rotten.

Hindsight aids my vision of now;
I can see the truth of you—
That you that I knew long ago
In the face that time has skewed.

Time—that moment that just passed.
It is ever dying and ever in birth
Leaving waves of life in its wake
Reforging all upon the Earth.

I am changed, for better and worse, this life continues to grow
Until the morrow comes at last that life ceases to flow.



Colorful Heavens
Karla Holley / Tyler / Acrylic



Blue Eyes

Hannah Weiss / Frankston / Digital Photograph

Never In My Life

Steven Pluth / St. Paul, MN

Never in my life did I think I would be going to college, and never did I think I would live to the age I am now. One must know of my past to truly understand why I chose the title “Never in My Life” for my essay. There was a time when I was homeless for many years, suffering badly from alcoholism—so bad I was just waiting for the day it would kill me. I never expected to get off the streets as I rode on the backs of freight trains to travel from city to city, in search of better climate with areas to pan-handle for my drink. It was, as I thought, my lot in life to die on the streets—homeless and forgotten.

One day my drinking landed me in prison for six years, and that day was the start of a new beginning. Prison had virtually saved my life and had inspired in me the will to change for the better. While in prison I studied hard in the vocational graphic arts and printing program that was offered to me. I worked as hard as I could to learn all that there was to learn about it. When I came out of prison, I was a journeyman printer, ready to work at being a productive member of society once again. I stayed away from alcohol and pounded the pavement looking for a job as I stayed in a half-way house and met with my parole officer, doing what was expected of me to remain out of prison. I found a job within a week of looking, and from that point on, I worked hard at improving my life with every chance given to me.

When I went to prison, I was thirty years of age, so I knew I had a hard battle to fight to get ahead. I had a lot to make up for. I soon met my future wife, or should I say, we instant-messaged each other because she lived in another state. For a while we talked via the Internet and then on the phone; by Thanksgiving, I found myself flying to spend a few days with her and her family during the holidays. That Christmas, I flew out again to spend time with her and her family; it was the first Christmas with someone in over fifteen years—another occasion I would never have expected to do ever again. I proposed to her then, and that next spring, I drove out to Texas to bring her and her daughter home with me to California where we stayed for almost a year while I waited to get off parole.

When I was finally off parole, we moved back to Troup, Texas, and I found a job at the first place I looked. The work was hard, but it paid well, so we were able to afford things on my salary alone while my wife took care of the house and kids. Never did I think I would have a family again, let alone have two children to raise, a fifteen-year old boy and an eight-year old girl, both of whom consider me their dad as I consider them my children. They have never had to see me in my worst moments when I was drinking, and they are both intelligent, earning top grades and remaining drug and alcohol free—I am extremely lucky to be a part of their lives.



Three years ago I was laid off from my job, and my back was ruined from the type of work I had done; I would never be able to lift much anymore, which is required in the printing industry. So I decided that it was the best time for me to do what I always had wanted to do, something I thought of long ago that could keep me sober and change my life around. I wanted to become an addictions counselor. I just knew I could help others if only I could help myself first; my problem was that I could never do that. I never thought in my life I would go back to school, and I never thought I could actually do well at it. On November 16, 2012, I was honored by being inducted into the Phi Theta Kappa Honor Society, which I never thought would happen. Another surprise for me was that I received a college scholarship. One of my professors, Mrs. Brooks in the English Department, had nominated me to receive the "Promises to Keep" scholarship that TJC's faculty and staff give to students.

So when I say "never in my life," you can understand why I say it. Never did I think I would get sober. Neither did I think that I would go to prison, nor once released, go back into a prison to complete my practicum requirement for addictions counseling and be a counselor for offenders. Surely I never thought I would go back to college and do well, let alone go at all, and never did I think I would be living my dream of being a counselor to people who were just like me. I am forty-seven and have been sober for sixteen years, and if I could give others good advice they would really listen to, it would be this: never think you're unable to accomplish your dreams because of how situations may be in your life. In fact, take all the opportunities life has to offer while you can because they may not be there tomorrow. Life is really too short to play around with it by thinking you will just do tomorrow what could be done today. Be good and true to yourself; follow your dreams because you may never know unless you try.

I will graduate this spring with honors, and I plan to further my degree to a Master's level; someday I plan to open a half-way house and help those just like me when I was homeless and had given up on life. I know it can be done; and that is what I am dedicated to doing, bringing it and paying it forward, never to go backwards again.



The First
Haylee Bazil / Tyler / Graphite

Beauty is Born from Contrast

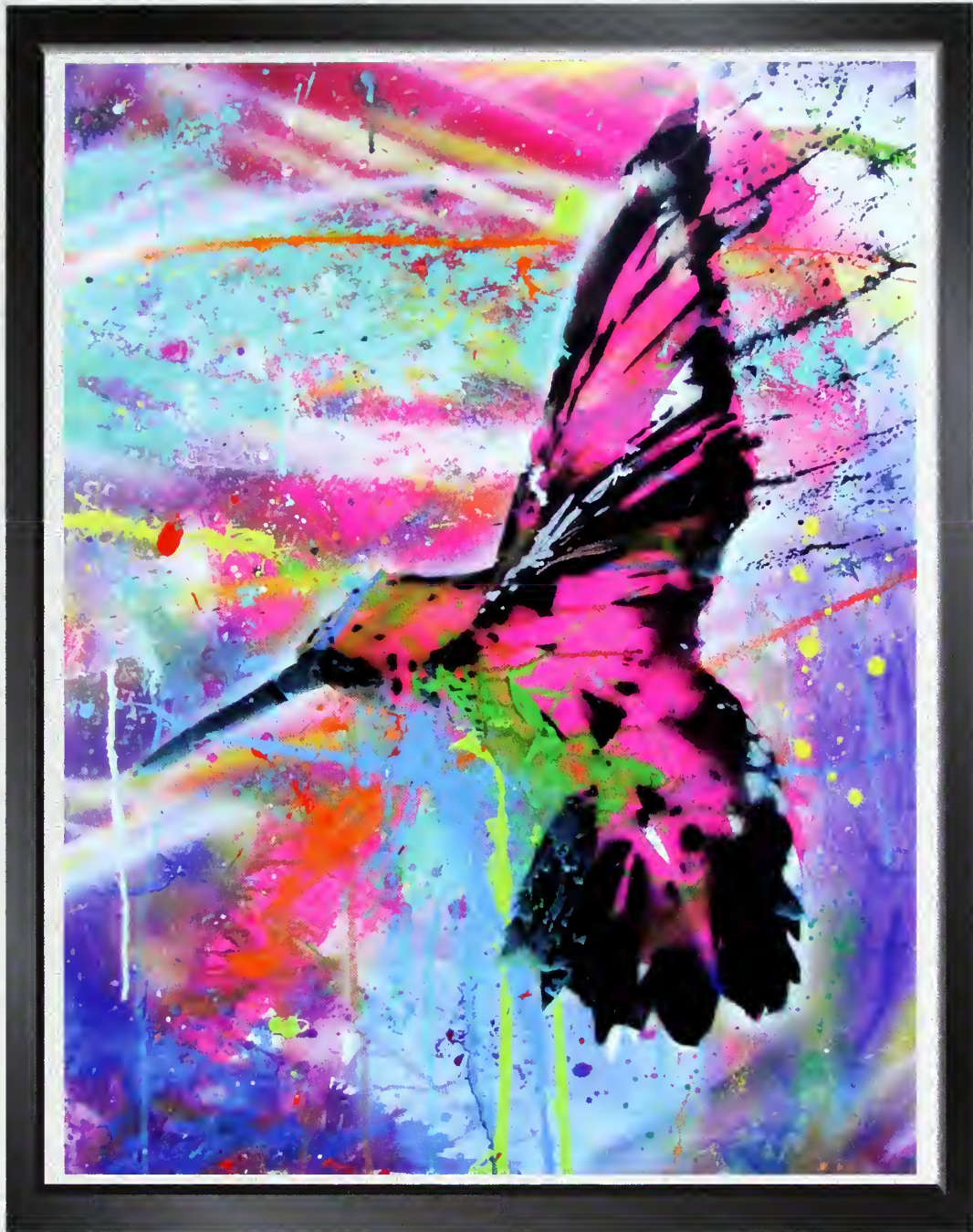
Josh Lynch / Harleton

Life is beautiful:
All of the evil and darkness
Are no more than dutiful.
What could love ever be
Without hate to see,
And could life ever bear
Without death to fear?
Could a rosy sunset
Shine so incredibly
Without blood let
Days of reddened glee?
Contrast brings us happiness,
And with all of these terrible hurts,
We're cursed—
And blessed.



Viggo

Lorianne Hubbard / Bullard / Charcoal on BFK



Hummingbird

Andrés Breffitt / Flint / Acrylic & Spray Paint



Can You See Us?

Lauren Withrow / Emory / Digital Photograph

Persistent Change

Josh Lynch / Harleton

Parts of me
That I can't hate,
This hunger:
On what should I sate?
Should I fuel this anger?
Or show it the hanger?
These waters are rough,
But in my trough they sit so still.
This calmness gives me
Tentative thrills;
These waters around us
Are subject to change.
All this time
Frame-by-frame
From this rhyme
Please take one thing:
Trees' lives are determined by their rings;
Ours are determined by our scars.
Cherish those,
And you'll go far

The Queen's Fall

Roger Lynn Parker / Houston

The shakes of the pill bottle, the opening of a Coke bottle—these are the sounds of my mother's addiction. My mother, the queen of our home, fell into an addiction after being in a car crash while heading to work. The pills were for pain, but after awhile, taking them slowly turned into an addiction. I always wondered why she would just doze off for no reason, but as a child, I didn't question my mother.

I realized the effect that drug addiction had on our household when my mom struggled to keep the lights on. As a child it's a horrible feeling to experience coming into a dark home. I remember coming home from football practice once and saying to myself, "I just want to lie down and watch TV." The deflating feeling of the lights being off was similar to a kid not getting anything for Christmas. Because every child looks forward to Christmas, to wake up that morning and not have anything is crushing and deflating, and I felt forgotten. The failure to pay the light bill was on my mom. This was starting to anger my dad to the point of frustration, which caused big arguments that were like two sailors who hated each other, cursing and swearing. I sat back, crying or swallowing the pain as if it was the most disgusting medicine known to man.

After a while, my dad grew tired of my mother's drug addiction; and instead of supporting her, he left us. My sister and I were deeply hurt by this and felt abandoned by our father. I still haven't told my dad how I truly feel about what he did. I wondered how a man, who says he loves us, could just pick up and leave without saying goodbye. Also, he knew that my mom had lost her job and couldn't pay rent. It was like a lion leaving his lioness and his cubs to fend for themselves.

I was worried and uncertain about what my mom was going to do since my father had left. My mother was strong and had instilled in us a trust, and she told us to let her figure things out. It amazed me that even in her state of addiction, she was still so strong. Like a boxer who never quits after being knocked down numerous times, she was able to maintain things for awhile, but the weight of everything from the addiction to the bills was too much. Finally, the Queen's knees started to buckle from the weight of everything, like the walls of a sinking ship. I remember waking up happy on my birthday and opening up the front door to the gut punch of an eviction notice.

I knew at this point that my mom had failed to pay the rent on time. She made sure that I had a great birthday, and I loved her deeply for that, but the eviction notice was still at the back of my mind. After some weeks passed, my mother couldn't come up with the money, and we had to move in with my grandmother.



We ended up losing all our things to my uncle's storage because he wasn't paying on it like he told my mom. He, also, had become addicted to prescription pills. And when we moved in with my grandmother, there were already seven people staying there—my uncle, his girlfriend, two kids, my aunt, and her son. That made ten people under one roof.

My mother went to rehab six months after living with my grandmother. The day Mom left was similar to the first time I ever stubbed my toe: it was painful as hell. I missed her the whole time she was gone. And when we went to visit her, she would hug my sister and me so tightly that not even a million-man army could pull us from her grip. I know she thought she was getting her second chance at motherhood, but one thing she also knew was that we never stopped loving her. When I was going into my senior year of high school, my mom finished her rehab. She has been clean for five years now. And at my graduation, I looked up to where my parents were sitting and started to cry, thinking, *finally, the Queen has returned to her throne.*

The slow, killing disease of addiction almost took my mother, my Queen, away from me. This disease affects many families in the world. I just thank God that my mother was strong enough to beat this disease into submission. The Queen lives on.



The Edge of the World
Haylee Bazil / Tyler / Digital Photograph

Frosted Fire

Schi-Lee Bennett / Fort Worth

I jump as high as I can,
Free fall.

The water catches my breath;
I break the surface, cold.

Droplets glimmer, green, gold;
Old forests whisper, seducing magic,
Water fall.

Roots beckon to me afar.

Golden light dazzles, no more dark,
Light flows.

I climb golden roots, higher
Into a busy canopy.

I forgot about the lost and free;
Tree bark bleeds my palm,
My pain,
Blood and tears drip on soil.

You find me here, uncoiled,
Blissful.

I jump as high as I can;
Your arms envelope me.

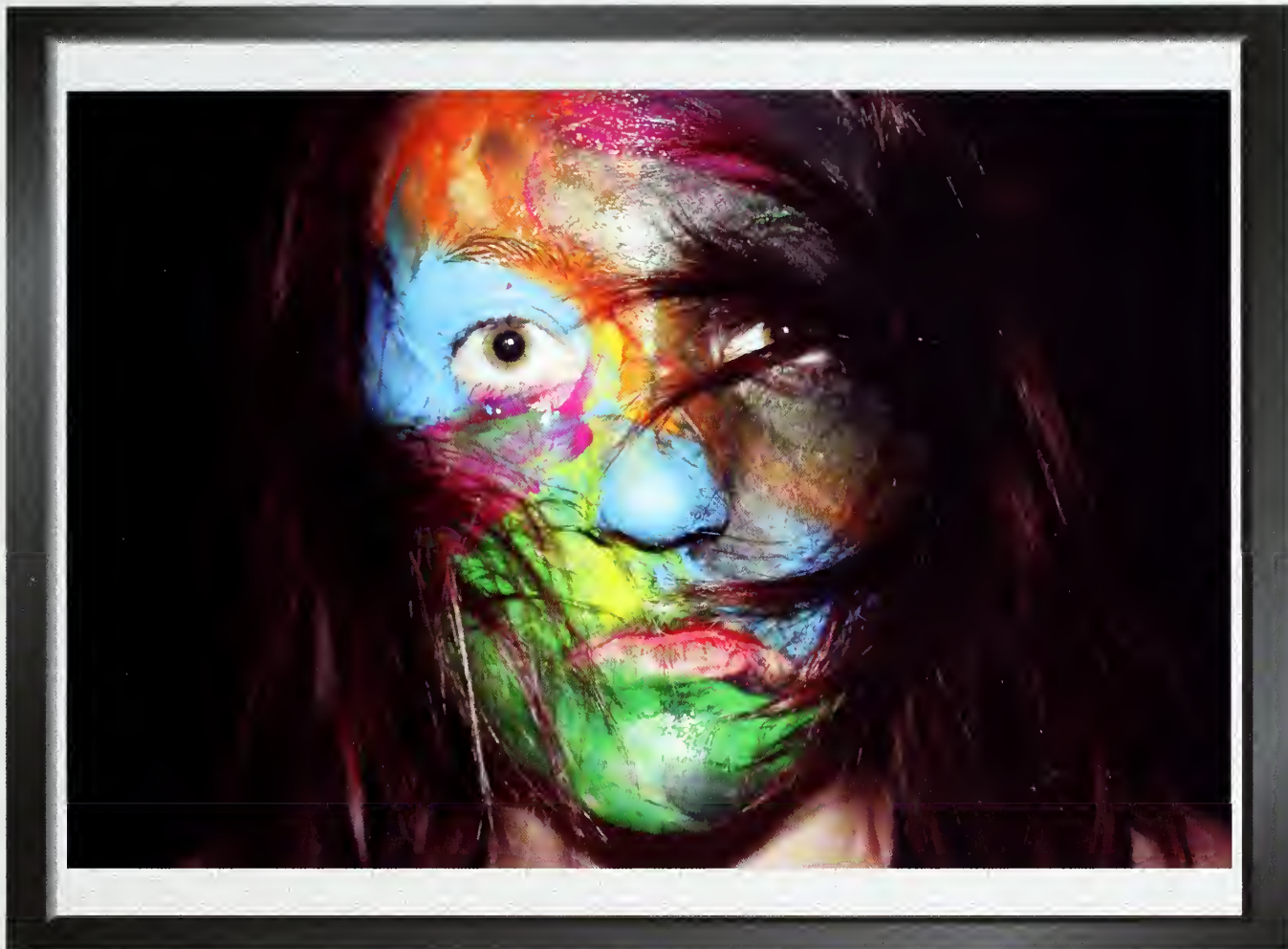


My heart is burning free,
Holding you closer, closer,
Frosted fire.
Your eyes glimmer, love surrounds.

I stay peaceful, with you around,
Silence.

Death will not separate this
Love between two hearts.

Free falls like Waterfalls,
Light flows through My Pain,
Blissful with Frosted Fire,
Silence.



Behind the Chaos

Savanna Caddell / Whitehouse / Digital Photograph

Molding Hand

Stephanie Platt / Tyler

Lord, teach my daughter to be brave, facing life when she is afraid;
Reassure her she will never fade.
Teach her always to put you first,
So she can see your amazing love burst.
Lord, keep her wrapped in your mercy and grace,
So if she falls she can see your face.
Protect her every day;
Send angels over her along the way.
Let her learn to stand strong in her storms,
So she does not feel lukewarm;
Build her character from the inside out,
So her inner strength will shine through without a doubt.
Give her compassion when others fall
And not make them feel small.
Molding my daughter's heart innocent and pure,
Give her a long and happy life so she can endure.
Teach her to laugh no matter what comes her way;
I know you are molding her with your clay.
Teach her never to forget how to cry and pray
And know you are only a footstep away.
Be patient with her when she is weak,
And let her know when she is at her peak.
Give her wisdom to make the right choices,
And let her hear the right voices.
Give her goals that are high,
So she can reach the sky.
Reveal her purpose and direction in her life
So that one day she will be a great wife.
Most of all, Lord, cherish and love this child, for
When your hand is doing the molding, you do not do it mild.

Contingent Upon a Verdict

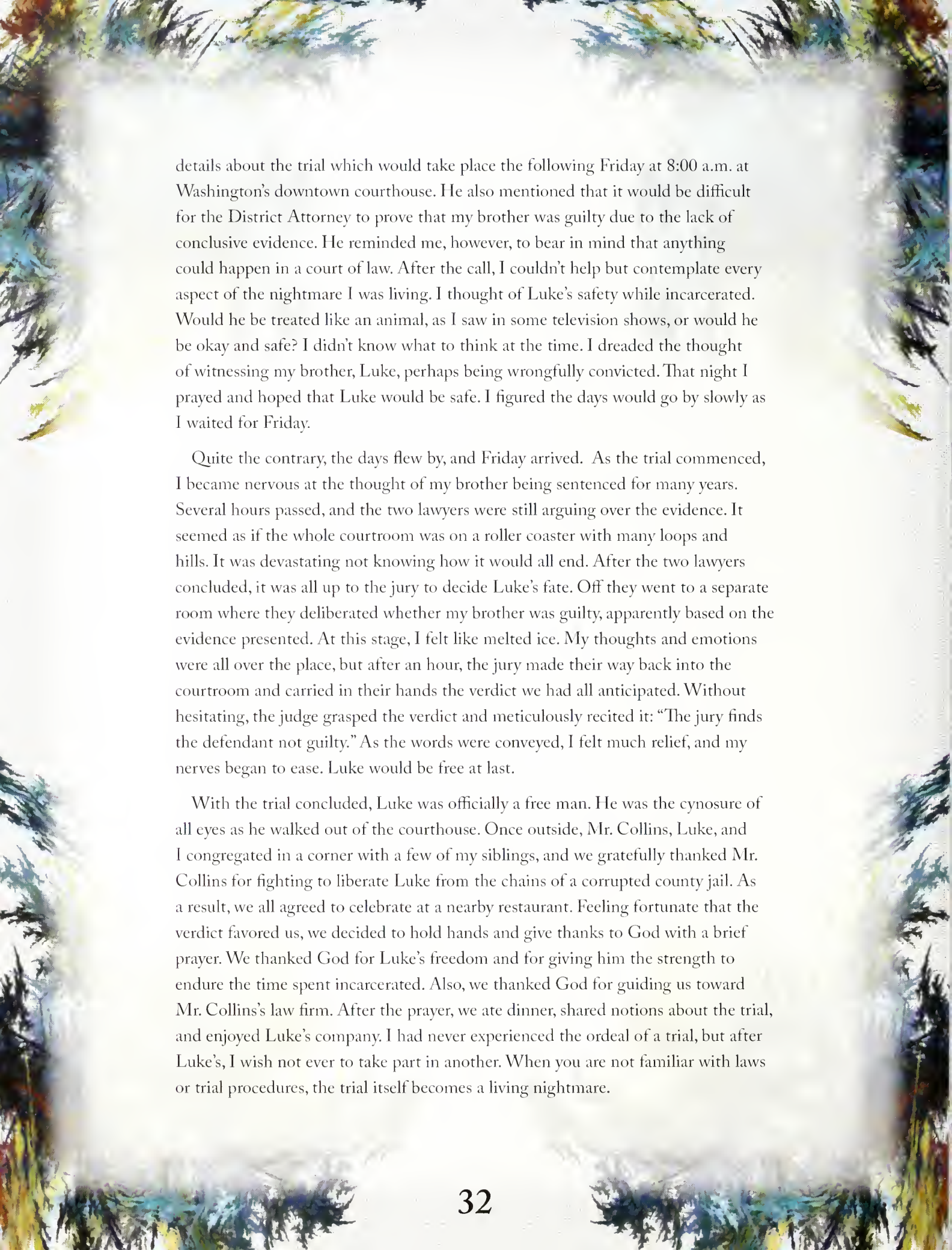
Urbano Lino / Tyler

Never have I experienced such a turbulent situation that encompassed laws, lawyers, judges, and a jury of twelve. It was a dramatic life-changing issue. My brother, Luke, was being charged with a second-degree felony. Unfortunately, my untrained ears couldn't quite comprehend the facets of the law, so I wasn't sure what was going on. The one thing I was conscious of was the fact that my brother would be facing two-to-twenty years in prison due to a fallacious report obtained by a peace officer.

My initial step was to speak to an attorney and get a better insight about what had transpired. With a muddled mind, I quickly rushed to my room and grasped my laptop. Unnerved about the whole crisis, I stationed myself on a couch, and I turned on my laptop, but apparently it was taking longer than usual to start up—or so it seemed. Finally after six long, dreadful minutes, my laptop was up and running, and without a second to spare, I began to surf the web because my thirst to find a lawyer urged me on. Just as I was about to lose my composure, I came across an attorney by the name of Joseph Collins who was available for a consultation the next Monday at 10:00 a.m. Because I was flustered by the situation, I was oblivious of what day it was. Much to my dismay, it was only Friday, so I would have to wait.

The weekend was long and arduous, filled with incessant thinking. I gawked at the clock for hours until it finally dawned on me that it was Monday, and I would be consulting with Mr. Collins in two hours. I showered and went on my way. When I arrived at the firm, I saw numerous cars parked outside, which gave me the impression that Mr. Collins was pretty well known and was bound to be a good lawyer. As I entered the eminent law firm, I became anxious, and a vacuous expression covered my face; however, I was determined to find answers to the perplexing situation. Suddenly, a man in a suit, whom I assumed to be Mr. Collins, appeared in front of me; he seemed to anticipate my arrival. At his beckoning, I followed him into what seemed to be a conference room, and he asked me to take a seat. He asked what had happened, so I rendered a full account of what I knew. He thought for a minute, and then said, "There is no need to worry. I will file a motion to request the discovery packet and get to the bottom of this." I paid a retainer fee of \$7000 to hire Mr. Collins, and he said, "I will call you and advise you about when the trial will take place. I will leave no stone unturned in Luke's case." As I was leaving the firm, I felt less stressed as Mr. Collins's words lingered in my mind.

Days went by. On a Wednesday afternoon, I pondered when I would receive the phone call I had been expecting. As if on cue, my phone began to ring. The screen displayed Mr. Collins's number, and I quickly answered. He then gave me all the



details about the trial which would take place the following Friday at 8:00 a.m. at Washington's downtown courthouse. He also mentioned that it would be difficult for the District Attorney to prove that my brother was guilty due to the lack of conclusive evidence. He reminded me, however, to bear in mind that anything could happen in a court of law. After the call, I couldn't help but contemplate every aspect of the nightmare I was living. I thought of Luke's safety while incarcerated. Would he be treated like an animal, as I saw in some television shows, or would he be okay and safe? I didn't know what to think at the time. I dreaded the thought of witnessing my brother, Luke, perhaps being wrongfully convicted. That night I prayed and hoped that Luke would be safe. I figured the days would go by slowly as I waited for Friday.

Quite the contrary, the days flew by, and Friday arrived. As the trial commenced, I became nervous at the thought of my brother being sentenced for many years. Several hours passed, and the two lawyers were still arguing over the evidence. It seemed as if the whole courtroom was on a roller coaster with many loops and hills. It was devastating not knowing how it would all end. After the two lawyers concluded, it was all up to the jury to decide Luke's fate. Off they went to a separate room where they deliberated whether my brother was guilty, apparently based on the evidence presented. At this stage, I felt like melted ice. My thoughts and emotions were all over the place, but after an hour, the jury made their way back into the courtroom and carried in their hands the verdict we had all anticipated. Without hesitating, the judge grasped the verdict and meticulously recited it: "The jury finds the defendant not guilty." As the words were conveyed, I felt much relief, and my nerves began to ease. Luke would be free at last.

With the trial concluded, Luke was officially a free man. He was the cynosure of all eyes as he walked out of the courthouse. Once outside, Mr. Collins, Luke, and I congregated in a corner with a few of my siblings, and we gratefully thanked Mr. Collins for fighting to liberate Luke from the chains of a corrupted county jail. As a result, we all agreed to celebrate at a nearby restaurant. Feeling fortunate that the verdict favored us, we decided to hold hands and give thanks to God with a brief prayer. We thanked God for Luke's freedom and for giving him the strength to endure the time spent incarcerated. Also, we thanked God for guiding us toward Mr. Collins's law firm. After the prayer, we ate dinner, shared notions about the trial, and enjoyed Luke's company. I had never experienced the ordeal of a trial, but after Luke's, I wish not ever to take part in another. When you are not familiar with laws or trial procedures, the trial itself becomes a living nightmare.



At Rest

Patrick O'Neal / Tyler / Digital Photograph

Meadow

Cole Beckham / Athens

The meadow green is like a child—
Slow and sweet
And apt to smile.

The smell of spring perfumes his hair;
His wildflower eyes allure,
An idle angel standing there.

Around the field, a bulwark grows,
Electric wood, with feathering head.

The trees awoke from song
And since
From song they came,
A song they sing:
The breeze will rally sound for them.

The breeze always remembers me.

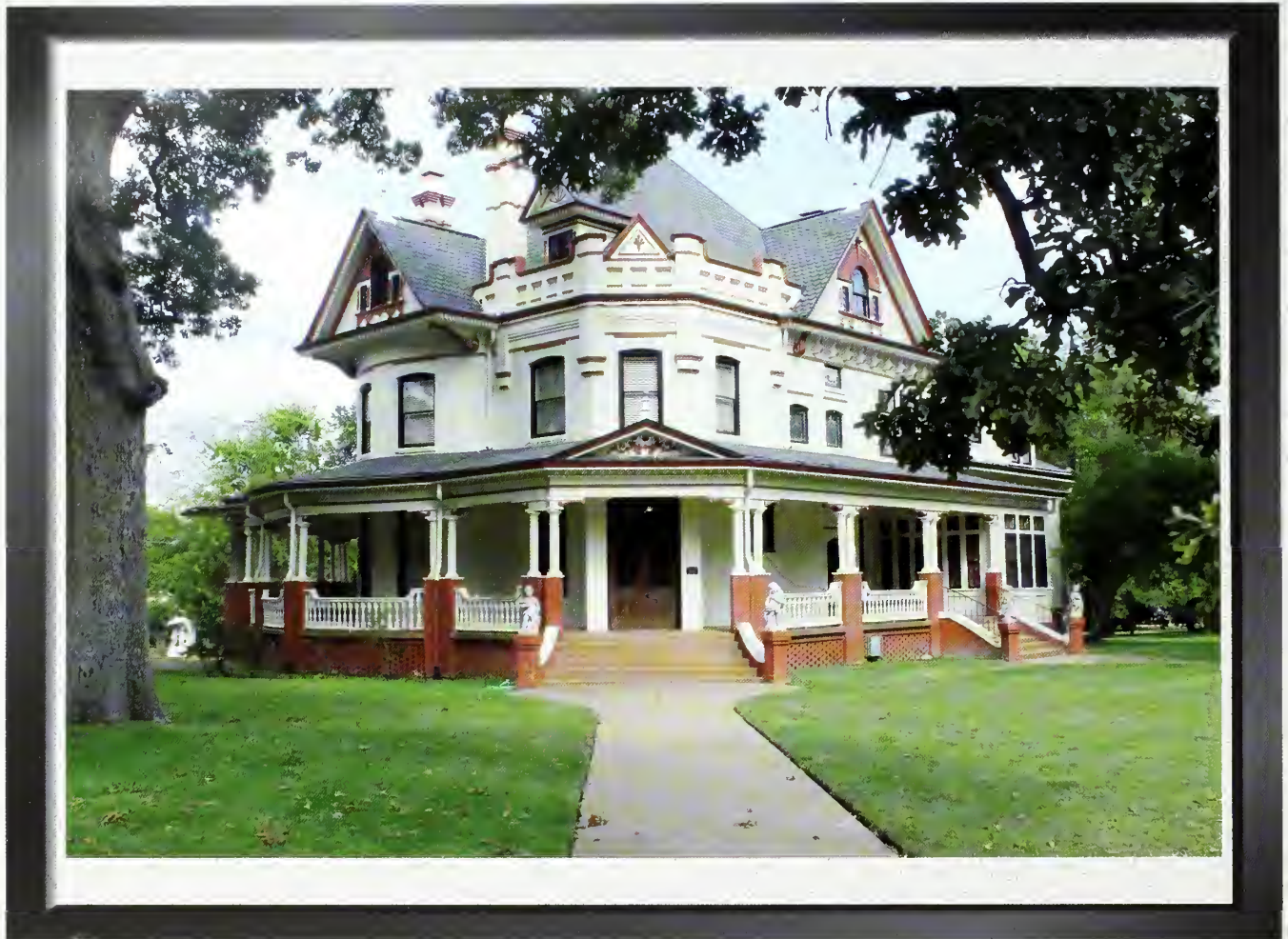
The leafy trees would softly din
The whispers of the wizened air.
A lovely sound of murmuring—
A noise to me,
But nonetheless,
I listened and remembered this:



“Keep the song of life! Endure! Listen to the wonder here.
Keep the sunshine close to you—drink the dew and rain. Endure.”

The trees are robed with plumage now,
Green and lime and lighter green,
Airy sky and lightweight clothing,
Lightweight heart and rivers rowing;
Waking shade of gentle trees,
The green, the lime, the lighter green—
The glory of the morning scene:

The smile of the meadow green.



Historic House
Virginia Black / Flint / Digital Photograph

Right Tool, Wrong Fruit

Lloyd G. Morey II / Mesa, AZ

With it I make incisions, I whittle and I carve;
I prick and pierce and gouge, such a handy tool;
A wooden grip, for control, which locks into place this blade
Of fine edge and smooth steel, also yielding precision:
This tool may be perfect for such a daunting task.

My eye catches a silver glint and also a slivered gleam,
Reflections in the metal of the room's surrounding light,
And I reach out for a plump and purple pomegranate;
With care I begin to shave away its protective shell,
And the peelings flutter and float to the floor like velvety petals.

A hard fight to free the arils from the pulp that surrounds them,
Plucking and prying, they burst, and the juices flow down my fingers,
Staining the tips, also seething around and into each nail and cuticle;
This struggle against bitter seeds, for a simple taste, just a small reward;
Patience is lost, time for the hammer, in the future I'm sticking to apples.



Ocean Soul

Chara "Joy" Malone / Santa Barbara, CA / Acrylic

Ode to Persephone

Diawnté Stevenson / Tyler

It's been a time
Since I found you
In the garden of despair
Planting sorrows
With an unguarded heart of gold.
Precious metal to mere men;
To me, you mean much more,
A boundless bounty of the gods—
You're a deity in your own rite.

Whoever knew that it'd be you?
To bring Lord Hades to his knees
Bowing at your feet
With a bouquet of poppy seeds—
Flowers for the dead, I suppose
Accept this as a token of gratitude
For bestowing me with resurrection
Breathing a new life into the depths,
Springing forth my essence
Through your gentle magnetism,
Keeping my ambitions grounded

My crowned jewel—
What other gem
Has toiled through brimstone
Misshapen to perfection



And appears as the archetype
Of Immaculate Conception,
My most prized possession
I hold you in the highest esteem.
You fit best under me as my underling;
Pardon my merciless grip—
My heart is forever chained to you
Think of us as cellmates sharing in misery;
Luckily, your company is worth the keeping.

Tears for the Living...



Don't Be a Square

Gabriel Meister / Tyler / Digital Photograph

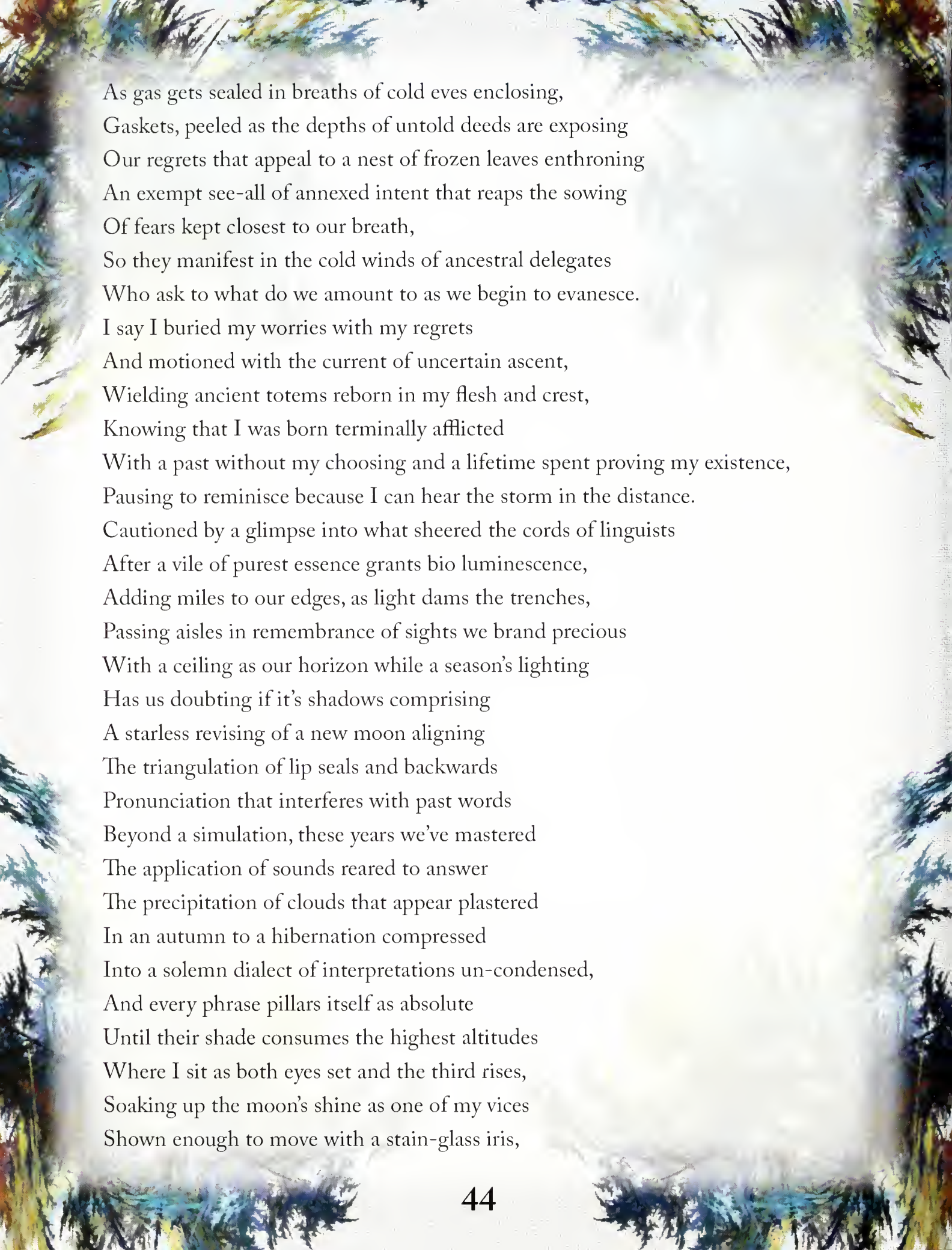


Denmark Angel
Tisa Kennedy / Arp / Digital Photograph

Phases

Erick Rodriguez / Tyler

I'm going where sundials are worn faceless,
And you can be lost without a trace;
It's a wasteland dilapidated by stasis,
For cavemen acclimated to stages,
But patrons decimated the ranges,
Making mazes out of desiccated arrangements
Of incinerated bases that emanate a respired fragrance
Replicated on vases dedicated to ageless statements
That precipitate into apexes that coagulate platelets
Until the aggregated placement causes a red moon to shape shift
Into an unresting sun during a resetting sky that marks the rebirth
Of an unyielding eye that charts my return,
To a forever setting night where every clock turns
An unbending light that inverts the unsettled earth
To reconstruct an image I observed
Beneath a towering, moonlit visage reserved,
For the astounding movement of pistons reversed,
Attempting to replicate the instance we learned
To extricate the most primitive urge
In the template of dissident words
As constricting pupils and a numbing mantra
Collide conflicting scruples in a thumping plaza
Of the post-mortem appliance and release of a pre-modern snowing
As a post-phloem and xylem species in a pre-auburn coating
Watch the leaves fall with gravity slowing
To match the people whose agony's showing,
In the lapse evoked from atrophy cloning
The past evils that left ancestries roaming,
A casket, regal; bereft of entities glowing



As gas gets sealed in breaths of cold eves enclosing,
Gaskets, peeled as the depths of untold deeds are exposing
Our regrets that appeal to a nest of frozen leaves enthroning
An exempt see-all of annexed intent that reaps the sowing
Of fears kept closest to our breath,
So they manifest in the cold winds of ancestral delegates
Who ask to what do we amount to as we begin to evanesce.
I say I buried my worries with my regrets
And motioned with the current of uncertain ascent,
Wielding ancient totems reborn in my flesh and crest,
Knowing that I was born terminally afflicted
With a past without my choosing and a lifetime spent proving my existence,
Pausing to reminisce because I can hear the storm in the distance.
Cautioned by a glimpse into what sheered the cords of linguists
After a vile of purest essence grants bio luminescence,
Adding miles to our edges, as light dams the trenches,
Passing aisles in remembrance of sights we brand precious
With a ceiling as our horizon while a season's lighting
Has us doubting if it's shadows comprising
A starless revising of a new moon aligning
The triangulation of lip seals and backwards
Pronunciation that interferes with past words
Beyond a simulation, these years we've mastered
The application of sounds reared to answer
The precipitation of clouds that appear plastered
In an autumn to a hibernation compressed
Into a solemn dialect of interpretations un-condensed,
And every phrase pillars itself as absolute
Until their shade consumes the highest altitudes
Where I sit as both eyes set and the third rises,
Soaking up the moon's shine as one of my vices
Shown enough to move with a stain-glass iris,



Sacrificing orphaned twilights to my many devices
While offering courted playwrights a basis of guidance
After saints slit their wrists
To paint the walls into an early eclipse
That stains the pulse of a mirrored ellipse,
And I see the same reflections in recurring lifetimes
In the disdain from interpretations of reassuring replies
In refrains where imperfections are obscuring the tides
Controlled by those who orbit in proximity
The distal prose accordant to the assembly
Of installed ropes that assorted the tendencies
To spell in reverse the meaning of words that I can't disclose
And dwell to unearth a seeping moat that I've carved to oppose
A cardinal sentiment, that asphyxiates the delicate,
Parted gulf precedent, as ash heaps initiate a decadent
Rebirth of desiccated apple-eye romances,
Inert until the blazes entice the antics
That revert to mazes applied in theatrics
From desert traces of defined lapses
Of efforts fated to denied passes
To networked cages of entwined panics
That aggregated the end-time passage
Into mental stages where set-eyes practice
The sentinel phrases that pledge my advances
To where I'm going; there the sun dilates
As the all-knowing and consumes all landscapes
Until the starlight attunes the primates
To a sundial's timed gaze,
Living until we crescent into place,
Becoming the full essence of degrade
As we pass on our worn and waning faces
To a generation of dissipating chain arrangements.



Out Reach

Angel Cawthon / Longview / Pencil on Paper



Mayan Woman

Tiffanie McDaniel / Amarillo / Digital Photography

Temporary Heaven

Carl Speaks / Arp

My heart is like a drum;
Its rhythm is my lullaby.
My eyes, like windows to my soul,
Shudder close to bring the night.

Heaven's fire shines through the shades;
Its dull orange glow seen through my screen
To bring a mental menagerie of light:
A thief, stealing my chance to dream.

Is it day or is it night?
Someone please turn off the light
Inside my mind and behind my eyes—
Can't take much more torment's delight.

Peace begins to settle deep:
At last, I can fall asleep
And put my conscious mind to death
To rise again in fantasy's depth.



Undone

Macy Frazier / Canton / Acrylic

Belonging to Something Special

Jose G. Rubio, Jr. / Palestine

The hardest and darkest hour for a boy occurs when he stands with his head held high and takes responsibility as a man. At the age of seventeen, I joined an elite unit: the Marines are a unit that every military around the world knows because of their past battles. Becoming a Marine is a long and hard process. The United States Marine Corps has no use for boys, and I was the young boy they did not want at that time.

Within my first month, I had a mental breakdown. I was standing on yellow foot prints in the dark; it was early in the morning, and I was listening to my very first briefing. The drill instructor and recruit introduction was established with an "I don't care who you are, who your parents are, or where you come from" speech. Then, just like the first day in college, the syllabus for the next three months was communicated by the drill instructor, but I was not really listening to what he was saying. The reason is that I already knew the whole "how to be a team player and give it all that you have got" saying. But the thing that I was worried about at that time was how to get off those yellow foot prints. I had been standing there for two hours, and it really started playing with my mind. I felt like I was weaving backward and forward, just like with car sickness. In fact, I wondered at the back of my mind how I could stop the motion sickness. I was spotted as the youngest guy out there on the yellow foot prints, and I did not have the privilege of being called "Recruit Rubio." I was known as the "boy" while everybody else was called "Recruit" along with their last names. After the *spiel* about how I was not going to make it to the end of Boot Camp, the real training began. The next couple of weeks of that first month were like Marine Corps 101. We were learning about Dan Daily, Chesty Puller, and all the customs and courtesies of the military. One of the things that makes Marine uniforms stand out from other military uniforms is the red stripe on the dress-blues uniform. The red stripe is known as the "blood stripe." It was awarded to the Marines because of a battle with Mexico; it is considered one of the bloodiest battles for the Marines.

My second month was split in half. The first half was hand-to-hand combat, and the other half was marching mechanics. Because I was the youngest, I was constantly getting hazed. There were two incidents that forever will be imprinted in my mind. The first thing that happened to me occurred in a wood pit where we trained to do hand-to-hand fighting. I was basically a test dummy for the drill instructors. I can still remember the red stains that I left behind on the wood chips. The blood stains were coming from my instructor teaching the other Marines the



effects of a proper punch, throw, arm-lock, leg-lock, and pressure points. All these were performed on me with no remorse. After that, I knew I would get tested more often to see whether I would quit or break. If I had broken a limb in Boot Camp, I would either have been kicked out of the Marine Corps, or I would get recycled into the next class. Everybody knew the best way to get out of Boot Camp at a quicker pace was to do what you were told and do it just one time. A second incident that tested me in the Marine Corps took place while marching on a hot parade deck. Out of nowhere, I was snatched out of the formation to test my manhood once again. I was told to get into the push-up position with a rifle across my hands and a boot applying pressure to the rifle, so there was no way to remove my hands from the hot, hand-blistering asphalt. Minutes felt like hours with the tongue lashing of the instructor, asking me, "Why are you still here? Why have you not quit yet? You do not belong in *my* Corps!" After five minutes of the brutal hazing, with blisters and boils all over my hands, he stood me up and vowed to me that I would not make it past the swim qualification.

My third month consisted of rifle and survival training and swim qualification, and the last week, like college, was finals week. I loved the rifle range. There was no hazing from the drill instructor. However, during survival training, the instructor stripped me down to my bare feet and made me hike three miles with a hundred-pound pack just to make up lost time from the rifle training. Swim qualification was in a chlorine pool, and I knew it was going to hurt once I jumped in. I had to pass underwater combat and water torture to prove to my drill instructor that I belonged in *his* Marine Corps. Underwater combat was a series of hand-to-hand combat moves performed under water. The water torture was the instructor's specialty. In order for me to pass, I had to swim with my hands tied across a fifty-yard pool without using my hands. At that point, the drill instructor dragged me to the bottom of the pool every time I swam ten yards. While at the bottom of the pool, I had to release all of my air and swim back up to get my breath again. Every ten yards my breath got shorter and shorter. Also, every ten yards the instructor held me down at the bottom of the pool longer and longer. The feeling anyone would get from this type of training is very discouraging. Although I could see the finish line, the instructor dragged me down to the bottom of the pool every time I got closer. It felt as if someone were taking everything away that I had worked so hard to achieve. Now fatigue started to set in my body. I was swallowing more water than



I was breathing air. It was the last ten yards, and I was at the bottom of the pool, struggling to get out of the drill instructor's clutches. Once I did so, I made my way up to the surface, and then I blacked out. I was then dragged out of the pool, and when I finally came to, the drill instructor said a phrase that every recruit wants to hear: "Welcome aboard, Marine!"

We were at the final stage of Marine training, and the only thing left to do was to get awarded the Eagle Globe and Anchor (EGA), the symbol that makes a Marine. I was at the very end of the formation when I received this prestigious award. After three months of hazing and threats about not making the cut, now it was my turn to get the Eagle Globe and Anchor. The drill instructor stepped in front of me to present me with an EGA, but instead of getting it from the wooden box like the rest of the recruits, he took his "cover" (hat) off and unscrewed his personal EGA. And for the first time while pinning me, he called me "Private Rubio." He told me that everything that had happened in Boot Camp was all business and nothing personal, and as a man, I should understand that now. The greatest feeling for a boy happens when he is accepted and takes his rank among other men.



Bug's Life

Courtney McKay / Tyler / Digital Photograph

The Pyre

Katie Rozell / Whitehouse

Seas of green foam
Beckon at the ridge—
Pale.
Words
Couched on older tongues
Beget less burden.
But do not wave skies of grey—
Lest life
Lost
Corrupt sodden dreams.
To be left
To the sea
Burned in effigy—
Upon a pillar of weeds;
Rosemary and garlic
Hawthorn and thyme.
They will burn me one day
In ashes and coal
In flashes not bold
To build new boundaries
In place of the old.



Cat Nap

Cari Colglazier / Flint / Digital Photograph



The Face of Wisdom

Sandra Leal / Puerto Montt, Chile / Digital Photograph

The Bell Tower



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